

## **Fr. Jeff Huard – 2017 Assisi Pilgrimage Homily to the Companions of Christ**

Years ago, when I was a young man, I was assigned to the UK for the university evangelism work we were doing. It was a beautiful time, tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit. We were going out night after night into the residence halls because we could do door to door evangelism – the UK was still allowing it at the time. We talked to thousands of students and it was just rich. We'd come home, get off the underground, get a nice greasy, newspaper-wrapped bag of fish and chips, you know, and eat our way home. I remember I had at one point five men's groups I was leading each week. Just so much happening. A set of us were about to go to Krakow for an event, that was another beautiful experience. I said I was feeling kind of exhausted and at that point life never felt exhausted. Then the book Philemon, I was reading the letter and St. Paul says to him, and of course you know the story, he says I've heard your faith and your love, you refresh the hearts of the saints. He goes on to press him to send a message back to him. He says, "I expect some good from you brother. Refresh my heart in Christ."

I just have to say men, coming, being with you, this time together, not only seeing your refreshing love and faith, but knowing it, it just refreshes my heart in Christ. As we ponder St. Francis, I'm recalling especially the beautiful little biography by Chesterton. He quotes Francis, at one point, Francis prayed, "Lord, to the degree I can know your love for me, let me know it, let me imitate it; to the degree I can know all you suffered for me, let me know it, let me participate in it." Part of the fruit of that would be the stigmata, but also this beautiful comment or observation of Francis, that for his brothers, his family, strangers, when he looked at you, you knew he loved you. When he looked at you, you knew he loved you. I felt like my experience from the Lord for us, that's how it's supposed to be amongst us. When your brother looks at you, you look at him, you are to know that he loves you. Now I'm not proposing we all gaze into each other's eyes...[laughter]. But that kind of encounter when we are together that people would say, "See how they love one another." Here are priests preeminent in love because Christ their master is preeminent in love.

I've been playing in my mind a song by Orlando Ortega, it's called "The Good Shepherd." And the Lord's been ministering to me through it because one of the refrains is, "I know you, I know you, I know you, and nothing can take you

away.” And then later it’s me singing, he says, “You know me, you know me, you know me, nothing can take me away.” So, we live men in that heart, He knows you, He loves you. I have been very convicted for this time that we come away with a new – tonight we are praying it – for a new wind of the Holy Spirit coming to refresh our hearts, to make us men who live in refreshing love and faith, who know your brothers. One of the things I want to exhort you to do, is actually really know your brothers, to take the time to personally know them. We know how it can be in diocesan life, I get struck at times that nobody knows what somebody else is doing. I have been walking with some senior priests and one of the deep things I feel for them and what they feel is, “Nobody really knows me now. I’m out of active ministry, I’m not getting called.” And it’s actually been part of the witness of Companions for some of them that we know them, and they’re not Companions but, well they are companions, they’re walking with us. So, take time to know your brothers and to refresh their heart. We have to fight and we will have to fight with some veracity to maintain an atmosphere amongst us where we only say the good things men need to hear, where we go to gratitude quickly, very easily, express our thanks to the Lord and to one another, to our people. And that we are men who actually guard an atmosphere where it is easy for us to put up honor for one another. It’s like lost(?). But to have that deeply in us.

Take time men to know each other deeply and to fight for this atmosphere and to pray for a new wind of the Spirit blowing. The other thing I am convinced about: God isn’t nervous. He doesn’t get nervous. And we worry about the Church, the world, and of course in The States we are having a national nervous breakdown, but God isn’t nervous. And as men in Christ I say, if you’re too sad, if you’re too mad, you’re dislocated in Christ. Go back and get located. I expect some good from you my brothers, refresh my heart in Christ.